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Corps tests repair to Mill Creek Dam; Bennington Lake to be higher than normal this spring and summer

Walla Walla, Wash., -- Bennington Lake will be filled about 20 feet higher than normal this spring to evaluate the effectiveness of dam safety repairs that were completed in January, according to an official from the Walla Walla District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"We repaired the side of the dam where we've seen some sinkholes since the floods in late winter of 1996," said Everett Wright, the District's dam safety program coordinator.

The Corps plans to test the new grout curtain this spring and summer that was installed to stop the seepage. This is to assure that the dam will perform as needed for flood storage. The Corps' goal in installing the grout curtain was to control seepage under the dam and eliminate any dam safety concerns, according to Wright. Mill Creek Dam was completed in 1940. Dam safety inspectors have noted seepage problems since the reservoir was filled the first time in 1941.

"During this time, specialized instruments will be read and the information analyzed to determine how well the curtain is working," said Wright.

Once filled to elevation 1,225, water from Mill Creek will continue to be diverted into the lake for a month to maintain the level while the Corps evaluates seepage under the dam. The Corps plans to leave the water in the reservoir and monitor the rate of seepage through the summer months. The extra water now going into the lake is expected to evaporate during the summer months.

"The lake will remain open for recreation, it has been stocked with rainbow trout and won't be affected by the higher flows. Depending on the flows in Mill Creek, the lake should reach elevation 1,225 by mid-April," said Dave Hays, park and operations manager for Mill Creek Project, which includes Rooks Park and Bennington Lake.

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MILL CREEK DAM/2-2-2

Flows in Mill Creek will be maintained at a minimum of 60 cubic feet per second to aid steelhead and bull trout migration and survival. All water diverted into Bennington Lake for the testing will go through the drum screens in the intake canal. These screens are specifically designed to reduce velocities during water diversion and keep endangered species from entering the lake, said Hays.

Flows from the lake will not be diverted back into Mill Creek, due to concerns about mixing the stocked trout with endangered species, said Hays. For more information, call the Mill Creek Project office at (509) 527-7160.

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